

Protection through connection: The Resource Stewardship and Protection Curriculum

By Jeri Hall

“Population growth and ... illegal activity threaten park resources as never before. Theft and marketing of artifacts, animal parts, plant life, and other illegal commercial activities threaten to bleed away the vital resource base of the parks.”

—The Law Enforcement Program Study Report (2000),
NPS response to the National Parks Omnibus Management Act of 1998

THE CHALLENGE OF PROTECTING the natural and cultural resources of the national parks is complex and requires coordination of a variety of important functions. These include applying a high level of resource knowledge to park management, educating the public about park resources and their protection, and professionally enforcing resource laws. One especially troubling concern is the vulnerability of park resources to theft and trade. In response to these needs the National Park Service has engineered an interdisciplinary, six-course training curriculum for the professional development of staffs to play a more effective, coordinated role in resource protection. Known as the Resource Stewardship and Protection Curriculum, the training emphasizes the proactive protection of resources by integrating park rangers, resource managers, interpreters, facility managers, and others. Ironically, specialized training of these staffs over the past couple of decades has isolated them from one another. The team approach, however, is stimulating collaboration among different park operations and regions and proving to be an effective strategy for the protection of highly threatened park resources.

The curriculum has been developed by teams of interdisciplinary NPS field employees in partnership with the Eppley Institute for Parks and Public Lands of Indiana University. Since its beginnings in Yosemite National Park in 1999, the curriculum has gained support from several NPS regions and at the national level. In FY 2002 and 2003 it was funded by the Natural Resource Protection Fund of the Natural Resource Challenge and the Pacific West Region, allowing for the curriculum's evaluation and refinement, and delivery to audiences throughout the National Park Service. This program is one example of how the Natural Resource Challenge has reached out not just to the scientists but also to the law enforcement and maintenance staffs of the National Park Service. Growing support for the training is indicative of an exciting transformation in the Park Service to a shared sense of responsibility for the welfare of park resources.

Four courses have evolved that reflect a philosophy of interdisciplinary collaboration for enhanced resource protection, while two courses target NPS employees who hold law enforcement commis-

sions. “Introduction to Resource Stewardship,” the first course, was attended by 25 employees this year, raising the total number of participants to more than 180. The third course, “Intermediate Resource Protection for Interdisciplinary Teams,” was designed in 2003 in conjunction with Indiana University and presented in December to 25 participants. “Resource Stewardship for Protection Rangers,” the second course in the series, was offered in 2003 in a revised format and attended by 26 law enforcement rangers, bringing the total number of participants to have completed it over the past four years to 110. Additionally, instructor and student notebooks for this course were finalized.

The curriculum's success has led to the potential for its implementation nationally. A draft report detailing options for this expansion was developed this year. Additionally, course coordinators developed a video describing the curriculum's mission and positive outcomes for use in promoting it. Finally, a cooperative agreement is in place with Indiana University to continue development and evaluation of the courses through 2005.



The protection of park resources is a shared responsibility, and a training program begun in Yosemite National Park is catching on across the National Park Service and institutionalizing this concept. The Resource Stewardship and Protection Curriculum emphasizes the development of interdisciplinary teams of highly trained rangers and resource and facility managers to meet today's complex resource protection needs in the parks.

This effort presents a long-term, strategic approach for the training of NPS employees in the use of law enforcement and resource protection techniques for natural and cultural resources. The course work is already giving these staffs the essential competencies to build proactive resource protection programs throughout the National Park Service. Interdisciplinary partnerships among natural and cultural resource employees, visitor and resource protection rangers, and other NPS personnel are enhancing the application of field-based techniques to protect park resources. ■

jeri_hall@nps.gov

Deputy Chief Ranger, Resource Protection; Yosemite National Park, California